



WISCONSIN DNR
FISHERIES INFORMATION SHEET

Water: First South Branch Oconto River

County: Oconto

WBIC: 484700

Year: 2016

The First South Branch Oconto River is a tributary to the main South Branch Oconto River. It begins as an outlet of Maiden Lake, then flows through several warmwater lakes before springs provide enough flow and cold water suitable for trout. The watershed is primarily forested and within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. The First South Branch Oconto River has a total length of 11.7 miles and averages about 26 feet across. The lower reach from Highway 32 down to the confluence of the main branch is considered Class I trout waters. A small stretch from Tar Dam Road down to Highway 32 is Class II waters.

Yearling brook trout have been stocked in the Class II portion of this stream almost annually since 1972. These trout are generally legal-sized fish that are typically stocked prior to the inland trout opener in May, although fall fingerlings have also been stocked annually since 2012.

Three habitat improvement projects were completed with funding by Trout Stamp dollars and Green Bay, Oconto, and Marinette Trout Unlimited chapters. Bank covers were installed in a stretch downstream from CTH W in the 1980's. Brush bundles, digger logs, boulders were installed downstream from STH 64 in the 1990's. The WDNR Wild Rose Habitat crew installed brush bundles in 2016 to provide habitat and improve fishability by utilizing tag alder.

The First South Branch Oconto River (Oconto County) was surveyed on July 26, 2016 to assess the trout fishery. A 0.60 mile (3200-ft) section of the river was sampled downstream from CTH W, west of Mountain in the Town of Mountain (T.31N.-R.16E. Section 20) (Figure 1). This section has been considered a trend site since 2007, is typically surveyed on a two-year rotation, and contains bank covers installed in the early 1980's. This station was surveyed regularly between 1987 and 1998. The number of brook trout captured per mile has ranged between 300-700 per mile over the last 30 years (Figure 2).

The overall health of the brook trout fishery in the First South Branch Oconto River is very good. Successful reproduction and recruitment of brook trout was evident from the length frequency of fish collected (Figure 3). Moderate numbers of legal sized (8 inch and over) brook trout were present.

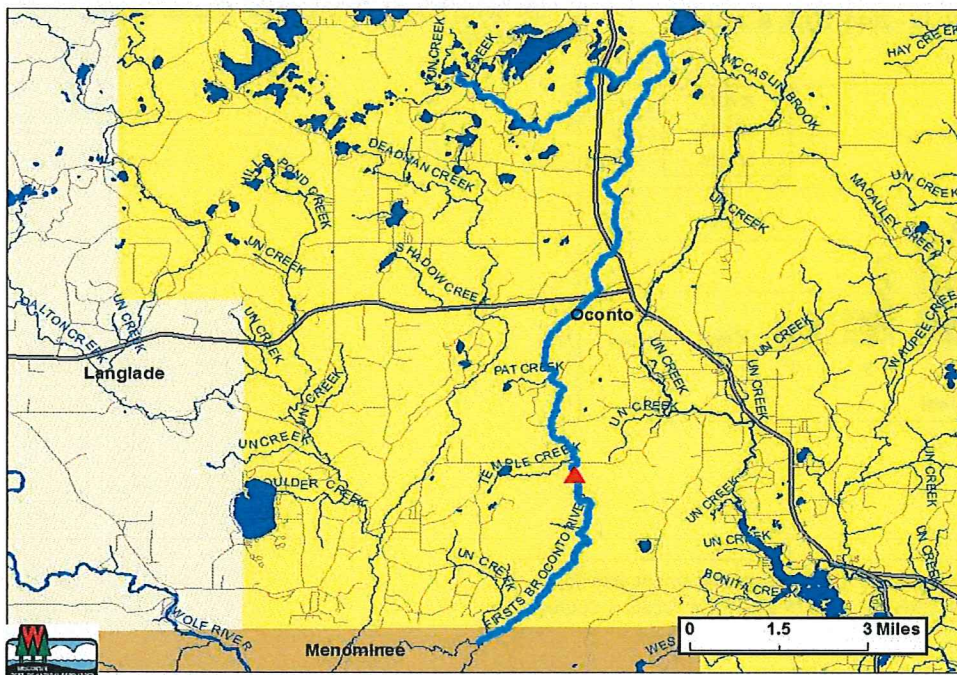


Figure 1. Sampling location (red triangle) on the First South Branch Oconto River at CTH W, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

There are a few road crossing access points along the First South Branch Oconto River. Major road crossings occur on CTH W, State Highways 64 and 32, Tar Dam Road, and Bonita Road. There are large segments of stream that do not contain road crossings within the National Forest and would require walking or wading up to several miles to access the stream.

The trout fishing season on the First South Branch Oconto River begins on the first Saturday in May at 5:00 A.M. and runs through October 15. The current fishing regulations (2016) on the First South Branch Oconto River follow the "Yellow, Caution" regulation of an 8 inch minimum and 3 daily bag limit for trout.

Anglers are encouraged to obtain and review a current copy of the trout fishing regulations before fishing these areas. Trout fishing regulations can be downloaded from the DNR's website at:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/regulations/index.html>

Brook Trout

A total of 225 brook trout were collected and ranged in length from 2.1 to 11.8 inches. The 2016 average length of brook trout was 5.8 inches compared to 5.5 inches in 2013. The number of brook trout was 369 per mile in 2016 compared to 479 per mile in 2013 (Figure 2). From 1987-2016, the average number of brook trout per mile was 459 fish. The 2011-16 length frequency chart suggests that several year classes of brook trout are contributing to the population (Figure 3).

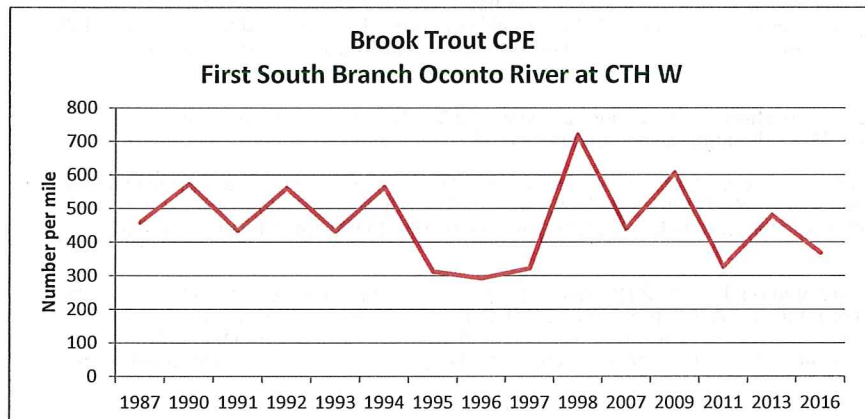


Figure 2. Brook trout CPE (catch per effort) for the First South Branch Oconto River downstream of CTH W, during years of surveys from 1987 to 2016.

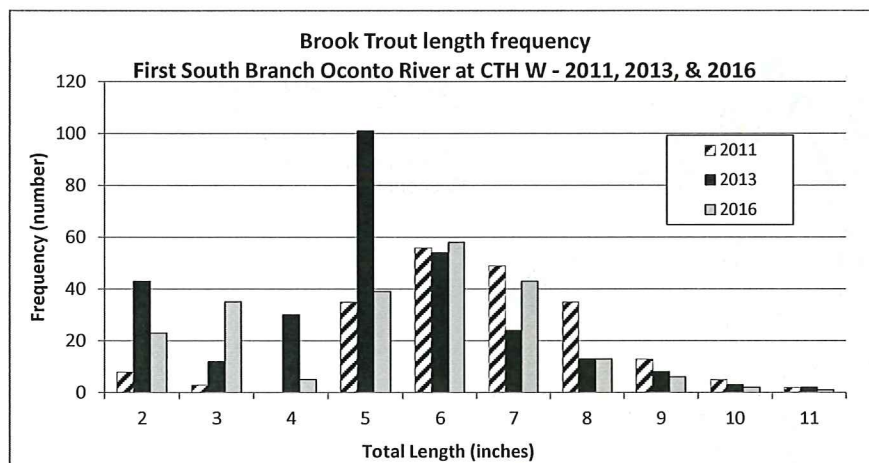


Figure 3. Brook trout length frequency for the First South Branch Oconto River, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

Questions regarding fisheries management activities for the First South Branch Oconto River, Oconto County, can be directed to:

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